# WHAT LECTURERS SAY: PERSPECTIVES ON MASTER STUDENTS' SPEAKING PROFICIENCY AT ONE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN JAMBI

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**Abstract:** This study examines the lecturers' perceptions of the speaking skills of master's students in the English Education program at a public university in Jambi. It discusses how lecturers evaluate their students' speaking abilities, identifies the main strengths and weaknesses, and addresses the pedagogical and institutional implications within the context of academic discourse. Three lecturers participated in semi-structured interviews to supply data for a qualitative case study. The results reveal striking differences in student proficiency; some students struggled with fluency, a limited vocabulary, and a lack of confidence when speaking English, while others demonstrated confidence, communicative competence, and the ability to convey meaning successfully. The findings also reveal that lecturers tend to prioritize fluency and coherence over grammatical accuracy, employing adaptive teaching strategies such as code-switching, scaffolding, and encouraging feedback to meet the diverse needs of their student body. These results highlight the disparity between institutional expectations and actual student performance, as well as the need for stronger language support systems. Each of these insights underscores the importance of aligning student needs with instructional support in the EMI environment. Overall, the observations highlight the importance of aligning student needs with instructional support in the EMI context.

**Keywords:** academic discourse, English education, English medium instruction, lecturers' perspective, speaking proficiency

## INTRODUCTION

Fluency in speaking is a valuable language-learning skill, particularly in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) settings where English is the predominant language of communication. To participate in oral presentations, research defenses, academic discussions, and professional communication, students at the higher education level—especially those pursuing degrees in

English Education—need higher-order speaking ability (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2019).

Since it helps students argue defenses, describe complex ideas, and engage critically with lecturers and peers, English-speaking skills are crucial for academic success. Nevertheless, many students in EMI settings still fail to develop into advanced speakers, particularly non-native English speakers who have little contact with the language outside the classroom (Macaro, 2018; Zheng et al., 2021).

Even if EMI standards are being accepted by institutions worldwide, research indicates that students often struggle with fluency, coherence, pronunciation, and confidence when speaking in academic settings (Zhou et al., 2023). A limited vocabulary, a lack of speaking practice, a lack of

formal training in academic discourse, and a fear of public speaking are some of the causes of these problems. Additionally, EMI students often experience cognitive overload because of processing academic and linguistic information simultaneously (Sweller, 1988). Hesitancy, verbal fragmentation, and difficulty maintaining focus throughout conversations are the results of this. Macaro (2018) points out that even while students are exposed to more English, poor speaking performance is often the result of a lack of specialized language support. As a result, EMI should be used in conjunction with suitable teaching techniques and language-focused approaches.

Although EMI has been widely utilized in higher education, most research focuses on undergraduate

students in non-English programs. For instance, Aizawa et al. (2020) examined Japanese undergraduate students enrolled in an EMI business course. They found that speaking, writing, listening, and reading were more difficult for those with lower levels of English proficiency. Moreover, Birgün (2024) also examined the opinions of lecturers on EMI in Turkish universities and discovered that while EMI enhanced internationalization and access to scientific knowledge, lecturers faced significant linguistic and pedagogical challenges that required specialized professional development programs. Furthermore, Coleman et al. (2024) examined EMI policy and practice in Indonesian higher education. They found that it was often driven by "common sense" justifications, such as graduate employability and

institutional prestige, rather than evidence-based pedagogical planning. Simbolon (2023) examined the attitudes of vocational lecturers toward EMI and discovered that although many of them supported it, many of them were not entirely aware of its pedagogical implications, particularly in relation to assessment and language use.

Postgraduate EMI practices have gotten less attention despite these growing realizations, especially in English education programs where advanced communication skills and academic speaking are crucial. Therefore, this gap highlights the need to learn more about master's program lecturers' perspectives on EMI to better understand how they evaluate and support students' speaking skills in English-mediated academic environments.

This creates a research gap in understanding EMI practices in Master of English Education programs, where students are expected to study the pedagogy, structure, and usage of English in addition to using it as a medium. Since students who exhibit superior oral communication abilities have a higher chance of succeeding academically and professionally, speaking smoothly is crucial in this situation. Nonetheless, issues including limited speaking fluency, anxiety, and low academic discourse competency persist (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 1999; Robah & Anggrisia, 2023).

Furthermore, professors have a significant impact on students' speaking abilities. Lecturers set norms for academic communication, provide feedback, and design speaking activities. Their perspectives offer valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of students (Birgün, 2024; Darling, 2024). However, there are still challenges in EMI classrooms, like balancing the delivery of materials with language support (Darling, 2024; Gaipov et al., 2024). Students could not receive the support they need to flourish if effective teaching techniques, such as scaffolding or translanguaging, were not employed (Gu et al., 2024). Therefore, to improve speaking instruction in EMI situations, it is crucial to understand the perspectives of lecturers.

This study aims to examine how teachers at a public university in Jambi perceive their students' speaking proficiency in a Master of English Education program, considering these considerations. The

study answers the following research questions:

1. What do lecturers say about the speaking proficiency of Master's students in the English education program at one of the public universities in Jambi?

2. How do lecturers expect Master's students to behave or perform in the classroom?

**METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate lecturers' opinions on the speaking ability of Master of English students at a public university in Jambi. To provide comprehensive, context-rich insights into how lecturers evaluate, understand, and respond to students' speaking abilities, this research was conducted as a case study, focusing on a specific educational context. Because it enables a thorough examination of real-life problems within a particular academic context and provides detailed accounts of participants' actual experiences, a case study design is suitable (Yin, 2018). The purpose of this study was to both characterize and analyze the viewpoints, expectations, and insights of lecturers regarding students' classroom speaking abilities.

The study's participants were professors at a public institution in Jambi who taught in the Master of English Education program. The goal of the study is taken into consideration when choosing participants using the purposive sample technique (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Hennink et al., 2020).

**Table 1**
**Criterion of the Participants**

| Inclusion Criteria | Rationale |
|---|---|
| Direct engagement with students | Ensures the participants have firsthand experience interacting with students, so they can provide informed opinions on their speaking abilities. |
| Experience teaching through EMI at the Master of English Education Program at of Public University in Jambi | Enables evaluation of students' growth in real-world EMI situations |
| Willingness to participate and reflect critically | Ensures that participants can express and share meaningful teaching experiences |

To ensure a thorough understanding of lecturers' opinions regarding the speaking ability of master's students in English education, this study employed qualitative data collection techniques. The primary technique employed was semi-structured interviews, which allowed for flexible responses while maintaining the essential themes—such as lecturers' opinions on students' speaking abilities, typical difficulties students encountered, and expectations for speaking competency in the classroom—at the forefront.

Thematic analysis, a popular qualitative method for identifying, examining, and interpreting patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), will be employed to analyze the gathered data. Because it enables a flexible yet methodical study of lecturers' views, thematic analysis is employed to ensure that the conclusions are based on participants' actual experiences.

Six systematic steps were followed in the data analysis process to ensure a comprehensive interpretation of the findings. The researcher began to get comfortable with the data by transcribing each interview, reviewing the transcripts multiple times, and taking first notes on key ideas. The data were then coded using open coding in the first coding stage, where text sections were labelled according to themes that surfaced from the

lecturers' comments. In the third step, theme identification, the researcher integrated related codes into broader themes and subthemes, paying particular attention to perceptions, speaking challenges, and lecturers' expectations.

In addition to ensuring consistency and a comprehensive understanding of the data, the fourth phase involved analyzing the themes that emerged among the participants. The fifth phase refined and precisely identified the topics to communicate the essence of the findings effectively. In the sixth and last step, the researcher drafted the report, presented the results, and incorporated direct quotes from participants to support interpretations and enhance the report's transparency and authenticity.



**Figure 1. Thematic Analysis Procedure**

The study employed data triangulation, which involved comparing results from multiple participants and validating them through expert consultation, to enhance credibility and dependability. To ensure that participants' viewpoints are fairly represented, member verification will also be carried out by discussing preliminary findings with them (Nowell et al., 2017).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
**Proficiency Assessment and Expectations: Heterogeneous Student Performance Levels**

The first primary concern was how lecturers approached and assessed the speaking proficiency expectations of master's students. All three lecturers reported observing a diverse spectrum of student skills in their classes, with performance levels that varied significantly from one another. This uneven performance pattern became a recurring concern, as lecturers reported an approximately 50-50 ratio, where half of the students met expectations, and the other half required significant improvement. *"I am unable to produce the class's overall performance,"* explained Lecturer C. According to Lecturer B, *"So far so good, but there is one or two or perhaps 40% or 50% of students might not be seen as proficient." "I mean, we have different kinds of students in terms of their proficiency,"* she said.

This situation aligns with both Harmer's (2007) theory, which posits that language development is influenced by individual motivation and exposure, and Nunan's (1999) argument that students' varied experiences and opportunities affect their fluency results.

## Academic Proficiency Standards and Benchmarks

Concerning competence standards and needs, lecturers established standards for master's students to achieve some levels of competence. Many respondents agreed that graduates should have reached the Common European Framework of Reference at level B2, which is equivalent to a speaking IELTS score of 5.5–6.0 or a TOEFL score of 500 or higher. These

expectations reflected the belief that master's students were expected to deliver successful academic presentations and scholarly discussions. As Lecturer C explained, *"Master's graduates, from the CFR level, they should be in B2,"* which confirmed this requirement. *"Yeah, 500."* Lecturer A added, again emphasizing how wonderful it was to achieve well on standardized tests. IELTS speaking score of at least 5.5 or 6.

This result corresponded with the findings of Leung and Lewkowicz (2019), who noted that postgraduate students should develop academic discourse competency to express ideas clearly and coherently in academic settings. However, this also supported the results of Macaro (2018), who found that EMI programs often underestimated students' need

for explicit language support while overestimating their language proficiency.

**Professional Experience vs. Language Proficiency**

It was interesting to note that the analysis showed that having professional teaching experience did not ensure that students would speak more fluently than recent graduates. Lecturers often noted that personal characteristics, especially prior education, were more important than one's current position. This research called into question widely held beliefs on the connection between language competency and teaching experience. *"So, profession does not guarantee that someone's speaking skills are good,"* Lecturer C said clearly, and Lecturer A agreed, saying, *"Not really."* Fresh graduates

could occasionally demonstrate their strong speaking abilities.

This finding supported the claim made by Zheng et al. (2021) that affective factors, such as confidence and communication readiness, had a greater impact on speaking performance than professional background.

## STUDENT STRENGTHS AND CAPABILITIES

### Collaborative Learning and Peer Support

The excellent qualities of students' speaking abilities that lecturers noticed were the subject of the second theme. The ability of peer cooperation and social learning to improve speaking skills was noted as a key strength in every interview. In collaborative environments, where stronger and weaker students encouraged one another, students performed better, creating a positive learning atmosphere. Group dynamics, according to lecturers, encouraged organic interaction between students without fostering superiority complexes or hierarchical connections. *"I think the strength point is when they involve each other, when they interact with each other, and they build the relation, yeah?"* Lecturer C said, highlighting this collaborative strength as a form of friendship.

This outcome aligned with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and scaffolding in the Zone of Proximal Development for learning. Additionally, it corroborated the findings of Robah and Anggrisia (2023), who found that peer collaboration made EMI students feel

less anxious and more confident when speaking in English.

## Communicative Competence and Meaning Conveyance

Students' capacity to communicate meaning despite language barriers was another noteworthy capability. Through proper vocabulary selections and compensatory tactics, students frequently succeeded in communicating their intended messages, even when they struggled with certain language forms or made grammatical errors. According to this communicative skill, students demonstrated an underlying language awareness that enabled them to prioritize meaning over form when necessary. "*Students can use appropriate words to express their ideas,"* according to Lecturer A, who noted this strength. Even though they are occasionally not arranged grammatically. At least they can convey their ideas.

This finding aligned with Hymes' (as cited in Hinkel, 2011) communicative competence theory, which prioritized meaning-making and effective communication over grammatical correctness. Similarly, Nunan (1999) highlighted that fluency and message delivery were the primary goals of communicative language training.

## Academic Maturity and Strategic Communication

Compared with undergraduate students, master's students demonstrated a better understanding of academic concepts, according to the investigation. Their maturity and professional experience facilitated more effective presentations and more precise explanations of complex

ideas. Students also deliberately used code-switching between Indonesian and English to preserve communication flow and guarantee understanding. *"The strength is that they do not have good pronunciation or fluency in speaking,"* Lecturer B said, acknowledging this progress. However, they discuss their viewpoints or organize their thoughts. In my opinion, it is superior to an undergraduate degree.

This observation was supported by Gu et al.'s (2024) explanation that translanguaging strategies in EMI classrooms enhanced comprehension and allowed students to continue communicating despite linguistic gaps.

## BARRIERS TO SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

### Psychological and Motivational Barriers

The third theme covered several barriers that students faced when communicating. Fear of making mistakes was identified as the biggest obstacle to active involvement, with psychological and motivational issues emerging as the primary hurdles. Due to their lack of confidence, students were unable to fully participate in class discussions, resulting in low participation rates. Only about 30% of students actively participated in speaking events, according to lecturers, who frequently noted that most students remained silent due to shyness and worry. This difficulty was highlighted by Lecturer A, who clarified, *"The incentive. The majority of you lack the motivation to engage in discussions and conversations because of your fear. They fear that they will make blunders."* She went on to quantify this problem, pointing out

that *"There are only 5 or 7 students who want to keep in touch with the discussion"* out of 19 students.

The results of (Zheng et al., 2021), who found that students' preparedness to communicate in EMI classrooms was significantly impacted by anxiety and self-confidence, were confirmed by this challenge. It also supported Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (cited in Nunan, 1999), which explains how emotional barriers, such as fear and anxiety, can impede language acquisition and performance.
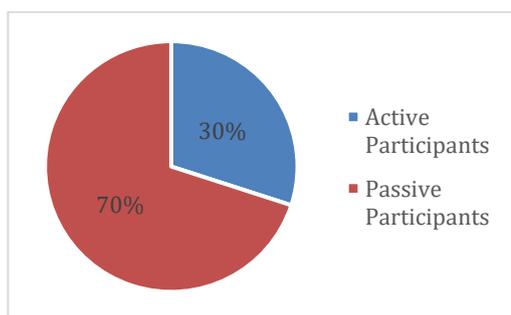


**Chart 1. Students' Participation in Speaking Activities**

## Linguistic Competency Gaps

Another important barrier area was disparities in linguistic proficiency. Students' limited vocabulary made it difficult for them to convey complex ideas effectively. Persistent problems with grammar accuracy impaired their communication's precision and clarity. Issues with pronunciation and fluency, including fillers, hesitations, and interrupted speech patterns, further hindered smooth communication. According to Lecturer C, *"Of course, for students who have low speaking skills, they cannot convey their ideas because they lack vocabulary."* This statement directly addressed the language barrier.

This finding aligns with Macaro's (2018) findings, which showed that EMI students

experienced both cognitive and language challenges simultaneously. Cognitive load theory posits that processing excessive information can overload students' working memory, impairing their ability to speak fluently (Sweller, 1988).

**Knowledge and Preparation Deficits**

Knowledge and preparation deficits constituted the third principal barrier subcategory. Students often lacked sufficient background knowledge about discussion topics, which affected the quality and depth of their contributions. Poor reading habits limited their exposure to academic discourse and specialized vocabulary, while inadequate preparation for class discussions reflected broader issues with study habits and academic engagement. In some cases, students required a

review of basic undergraduate-level concepts before progressing to master's level content. Lecturer B *identified this as a critical weakness, explaining, "Maybe the significant weakness of my students is that they do not have a reading habit. So, they do not have enough background knowledge to share their ideas."*

This outcome supported the claim made by Leung and Lewkowicz (2019) that both linguistic competency and academic literacy were required for successful speaking performance in higher education.

**ASSESSMENT PRIORITIES AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES**

**Fluency-Focused Assessment Philosophy**

The fourth theme explored how lecturers prioritized different aspects of speaking assessment and adapted

their teaching approaches accordingly. A dominant pattern across all interviews was the emphasis on fluency over accuracy, where lecturers prioritized successful communication and message delivery over grammatical correctness. This approach reflected a communicative language teaching philosophy that valued meaningful interaction and encouraged student participation through error tolerance. Lecturers also demonstrated awareness of World Englishes perspectives, accepting non-native varieties as legitimate forms of communication. Lecturer A explicitly stated, *"I do not really care about making mistakes in terms of grammar,"* while Lecturer C emphasized communication over content accuracy: *"For me, it is like saying, actually I do not care whether the content is true or not, as long as you can talk."*

The World Englishes perspective, which prioritizes intelligibility and communicative success over native-like correctness (Birgün, 2024), and the tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 1999) align with this method.

**Academic Discourse Expectations**

Nonetheless, lecturers continued to hold students to greater standards for coherence and subject quality, especially in academic discourse at the master's level. They anticipated that students would exhibit well-structured, cohesive presentations that showcased analytical and critical thinking abilities suitable for graduate-level coursework. Professional communication skills were

considered to require both pragmatic competence and contextual appropriateness. In her assessment methodology, Student A gave coherence top priority, saying, *"Of course, coherence... You must be prepared to pursue a master's degree. You must learn more about a certain subject."*

This was consistent with the claim made by Leung and Lewkowicz (2019) that academic discourse competence was a key factor in determining postgraduate oral competency.

**Adaptive Teaching Strategies**

To meet the diverse needs and skill levels of the student body, lecturers employed a range of adaptive teaching techniques. These included individualized expectations tailored to each student's ability, flexible language regulations that permitted strategic code-switching, supportive feedback strategies that offered indirect error correction, and scaffolding tactics that enabled skill development over time. This adaptable strategy was demonstrated by Lecturer A, who said, *"In my situation, as long as we are in an Indonesian context, it is alright. To ensure that they do not misunderstand and misinterpret the concepts."*

These methods supported Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes learning through interaction and guidance. They also agreed with Gu et al. (2024), who found that scaffolding and translanguaging in EMI classrooms foster inclusivity and understanding.

## INSTITUTIONAL AND CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES

**Admission Standards and Performance Gap**

The last theme discussed more general structural problems that impacted student performance and the master's program. The discrepancy between admission requirements and actual student performance was a significant topic that raised concerns regarding selection procedures and admission standards. Due to the discrepancy between program goals and student abilities, lecturers believed that some students require extra remedial help outside of the regular classroom. To voice her worry, Lecturer A stated, *"So, I do not know what the criteria for the selection are, but I did expect them to be more active in the teaching and learning process."*

This finding is consistent with Coleman et al. (2024), who found that EMI implementation in Indonesian universities was often motivated by institutional prestige rather than readiness or pedagogical planning.

**Curriculum Constraints and Time Management**

For lecturers, who must often modify course objectives based on student competency levels, curriculum, and time limits, posed constant obstacles. When lecturers had to spend more time going over fundamental ideas rather than moving on to more advanced material as initially intended, time allocation became an issue. The general tempo and breadth of the course material were affected by this circumstance, which could jeopardize the achievement of learning goals. This challenge was explained by Lecturer

A, *"So, I think that is the problem. I must therefore reiterate or go over some of the fundamental information on the subject. I am unable to advance to the more specialized subjects for a higher level of competence."*

This finding supports that of Darling (2024), who found that teachers in EMI classes struggled to balance providing adequate linguistic support with teaching academic content. Similarly, Gaipov et al. (2024) emphasized that EMI professors required professional training to manage these competing expectations effectively.
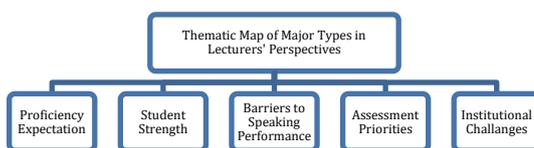
**Professional Readiness and Development Implications**

As lecturers doubted graduates' preparedness for professional practice and teaching responsibilities, ramifications for professional development became apparent. The professional duties that graduates were expected to take on made the necessity for increased competency levels clear. This issue persisted beyond graduation, indicating that professional development and ongoing improvement were still necessary for graduates' job success. This professional dimension was highlighted by Lecturer B, who said, *"Because a master's degree should show their level of good proficiency in English, because it relates to the profession as English, maybe not only teachers, but practitioners."* The results validated the views of Macaro (2018), who emphasized the integration of language and content goals in EMI programs, and Birgün (2024), who suggested that ongoing lecturer training was

essential for improving the quality of EMI instruction.

Thematic Map of Major Types in Lecturers' Perspectives

Proficiency Expectation | Student Strength | Barriers to Speaking Performance | Assessment Priorities | Institutional Challanges

**Figure 2. Thematic Map of Major Types in Lecturer's Perspectives**

**CONCLUSION**

The results of the theme analysis revealed a significant discrepancy between the realities of classroom instruction and institutional expectations in master level English instruction programs. Lecturers frequently found diverse classes where over 50% of students struggled to satisfy speaking competency criteria, despite programs expecting students to reach B2 CEFR skill levels. The study demonstrated that psychological barriers, particularly fear of making mistakes and low confidence, represented the most significant obstacles to student participation, with only 30% actively engaging in speaking activities. Interestingly, professional teaching experience did not correlate with superior speaking skills, challenging common assumptions about the relationship between career background and language proficiency.

The study highlights the adaptive pedagogical approach of lecturers, who uphold standards for academic discourse coherence while placing greater emphasis on communicative ability and meaning-making over grammatical precision. Although this communication-focused approach reflects contemporary language teaching ideas, it also leads to constant conflicts between meeting the needs

of various students and upholding graduate-level standards. According to the findings, to close the gap between institutional aspirations and student realities, master's programs in English education should systematically modify their admissions requirements, curriculum design, and student support systems. Ultimately, the study recommends more sophisticated strategies that address the linguistic and psychological barriers hindering students' success in graduate-level English-speaking environments, while striking a balance between academic rigor and real-world communication requirements.

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